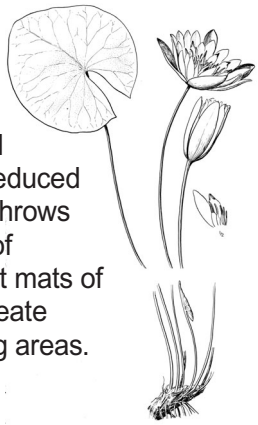
Don't Give Noxious Weeds a Home

Invasive urban weeds

Many noxious weeds start as garden favorites. They are pretty and they thrive wherever planted. They are also invasive. They manage to escape backyard gardens and ponds with the help of birds, or they hitchhike on tires, shoes or animals. Aquarium dumping is one way for aquatic weeds to get to a lake. Plant fragments on boats are moved from one lake to another. One thing the weeds all have in common: once they escape their cultivated homes they overrun our parks, trails, lakes and waterways.

English ivy is an urban weed. Gardeners, or retailers, may be unaware that ivy plants dangling from garden baskets and sale tables are the same plants capable of weighing 2100 pounds and toppling trees. As ivy crawls through parks and ravines, it blankets tree seedlings and anything else in its way. The thick mats collect garbage and hide rats and mosquitoes.

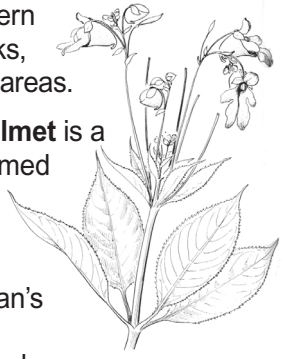
Fragrant water lily and Eurasian watermilfoil can present big problems in the urban environment when they foul boat motors, snag fishhooks, impede canoe travel, or get tangled with your dog. They directly impact our native fish by increasing the water temperature and lowering dissolved oxygen, and the reduced plant biodiversity throws the food web out of balance. Stagnant mats of vegetation also create mosquito-breeding areas.



Poison-hemlock is often confused with Queen Anne's lace. Mainly found along roadsides, or in empty lots, it also shows up as a 'volunteer' in gardens. Poison-hemlock is deadly if eaten. The hairless, smooth hollow stems often have purple blotches. It can get eight feet tall or more. Poison hemlock starts growing in early spring, producing flowers in late spring.

Giant hogweed may be easier to recognize since it can grow 15 feet tall. This plant is a public health threat that burns and scars anyone unlucky enough to come in contact with the clear watery sap. Hogweed invades natural areas and degrades habitat.

Garlic mustard is a shade tolerant herb with small, white, four-petalled flowers in early spring. To date we have very little of it in our state. Only by working together can we prevent this pest from becoming the dominant weed throughout western Washington parks, trails and shady areas.



Policeman's helmet is a tall, hollow stemmed annual with pink flowers resembling an English policeman's helmet. It ejects thousands of seeds per year, and quickly dominates gardens, parks and wetlands.

Garden loosestrife is another garden escapee with bad habits similar to purple loosestrife. This tall perennial with bright yellow five-petalled flowers produces long rhizomes. The rhizomes cause solid, dense patches, helping garden loosestrife out-compete native wetland plants, and even purple loosestrife.

MORE INFO ON BACK

King County
Department of
Natural Resources and Parks

Five Steps to: Natural Yard Care

Don't Give Noxious Weeds a Home

Plant right for your site

King County
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What Can You Do About Weeds?

Prevention: don't give weeds a chance. Choose non-invasive species for your gardens and landscapes. Before planting any new plant, check first if it is a recognized weed, and if it is, don't plant it. There are non-invasive alternative plants available for all types of sites. Weeds thrive in bare soil and neglected garden areas. Minimize the amount of soil and vegetation disturbance when carrying out work. Disturbed ground provides ideal conditions for the germination of weed seeds. Replace any diseased or dying plants quickly to prevent weed invasions.

Cultural Control: a healthy landscape is the best weed control. Choose the right plants for the site and treat them well because they are the best defense against unwanted visitors. Grow vigorous and healthy plants that can out compete the weeds. A healthy, vigorous cover of vegetation helps prevent weed invasion. Weeds can be smothered with weed barriers or lots of mulch. Mulch denies the weed seeds the light they need to germinate or is an impenetrable layer for emerging weed seedlings. Mulching also preserves moisture in the soil for more desirable plants.

Physical control: be a control freak with problem weeds. A single weed flower can produce thousands of seeds. To prevent future infestations, remove weeds before they go to seed. Cultivating with a hoe works well on young or shallow-rooted weeds in garden beds or paths. Long-handled pincer-type weed pullers work great for weeds with taproots like thistles, especially in lawns when soil is moist. Digging up weeds when the soil is moist helps remove all of the roots and minimizes resprouting. Propane weeding torches scorch and kill most weeds without damaging plants around them; repeated flame treatment may be needed for tough weeds. Be aware of fire hazards when using torches, as well as the potential to burn your feet. Spring and fall, when the ground is moist and weeds have just sprouted, is the safest and most effective time to use a torch. Mowing is not an effective control method for many noxious weeds because of the ability of the weeds to resprout.

Chemical Control: a last resort for the toughest weeds. When considering the use of herbicides for difficult weed problems use the least toxic herbicide available and carefully apply them (only as directed on the label) directly onto weed leaves. Do not use "weed and feed" or persistent pre-emergent products, which can run off into streams and the Puget Sound. Some herbicides should not be used in wet areas or their buffers. If you are using herbicides on a regular basis, there may be a landscape design or soil problem that needs to be addressed. For information on control methods and specific herbicide recommendations to control noxious weeds, contact the King County Noxious Weed Control Program at 206-296-0290.

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